

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

mystery magazine

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In this modern age, one still finds applicable the philosophy of Sophocles, "... for of mortals most find friendship an unstable anchorage."



ADAM CARLSON listened to the faint howl of a dog, and fifteen seconds later he heard the hum of an airplane. The sound of the motors grew rapidly louder until the plane passed directly over the house.

In the glare of the naked overhead bulb, he glanced at his watch. 2:32 A.M.

Adam sat up on the cot and

stared about the room once again. Twelve feet by fourteen. No windows. Solid concrete block construction except for the heavy oak door. Almost soundproof, but not quite. The dog must be fairly near.

How long had he been here? It seemed like days, but actually it had been only about eight hours. It had begun yesterday

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evening. Where would it end?

Adam had just put his car into the garage and begun the walk up the long path to the house when they stepped out of the darkness. There had been two of them, both hooded, and they held guns.

He had been startled, of course, but not really frightened. His hands had gone above his head. "Take the money, but leave the wallet." He had been thinking about the nuisance of getting duplicates of his driver's license and various other cards and identifications if the wallet were taken.

But they hadn't been concerned about his wallet or the money. The tall heavy-set man had merely indicated with the automatic that he wanted Adam to walk ahead of them.

They had gone back down the driveway, past the two gate posts, and to the dark sedan parked by the side of the gravel road.

Adam had been blindfolded and bound and put on the floor in the rear of the car. At first he had tried to keep track of the direction in which they drove. But they had turned again and again until he had become confused and given up.

After an hour the car had stopped and the ropes had been removed from his ankles. With

the blindfold still on, he had been led along a path and he had heard a door being opened. He had been guided down a flight of stairs and into this room.

When they untied his hands and removed the blindfold, he had blinked at the sudden light. As his eyes adjusted he had seen the bare room with its cot, its single chair, its table, and the pen and paper.

The big man had spoken for the first time. "Sit down," he ordered. "You're going to write a note to your wife. We're asking for two hundred thousand dollars."

Adam had stared at the hooded figures. "Two hundred thousand dollars?"

Perhaps there had been a smile behind the hood. "That's right, mister. Maybe you got it figured out by now why we picked you up."

Adam had licked his lips. "My wife left for Europe last week with her mother."

The two hooded men had looked at each other. Did they seem uncertain? The big man had raised the gun. "We want the two hundred thousand. We don't care how you get it or who gets it for you, but we want it."

Adam had sat down at the table. "Harold Bannister. He's my

lawyer and long-time counselor." The gun moved again. "Pick up the pen. I'll tell you what words to use."

And Adam had written:
Dear Harold:

I want you to get two hundred thousand dollars together, none of it in bills larger than one-hundreds.

You will be phoned instructions about what to do with it later.

Do not notify the police. If you do, you will never see me alive again.

Adam Carlson

The big man had read the note and then nodded. He and his partner had left the room and Adam had heard the heavy door being locked.

Now Adam lay down on the cot once again. He closed his eyes against the glare of the single bare bulb overhead.

Would they kill him after they got the money? But if that was their intention, why would they bother to wear the hoods? Adam grasped at that. As long as they wore the hoods—as long as they took the pains to make sure that he could not identify them later—his life was safe.

Adam woke with a start as he heard a key in the door. He glanced at his watch. Eight twenty-

five. He'd managed to fall asleep. He felt his heart pounding as he watched the door open.

The big man entered alone with a tray. And he was still hooded. "Your breakfast," he said.

He waited until Adam indicated that he'd eaten as much as he wanted and then took the blindfold out of his pocket. "You're going to phone your office. Tell your secretary that you won't be in for at least a week. Tell her you're taking a trip."

He was led to a spot just outside the door.

"What's your number?" the big man asked.

Adam told him and then heard the dialing. He felt the phone thrust into his hand. His secretary, Madge, answered the rings. "Madge," Adam said, "I won't be in for about a week. I'm taking a little vacation trip."

"Yes, sir," she said. "Where can I reach you in case I have to?"

"You won't have to," Adam said. "Just put everything off. Cancel all my appointments."

The big man took the phone from him. "Maybe there's somebody else you ought to call, too? Just remember, for your own health we wouldn't want anybody getting worried about you and telling the police."

Adam thought for a moment. "My housekeeper." He gave the big man his number and the phone was once again put into his hand.

"Mrs. Regan?"

"Yes," she said. "Is that you, Mr. Carlson?"

"Yes."

"Where are you? This morning when you didn't come down for breakfast, I got worried. I sent James looking for you, but he couldn't find you. He said that you must have come home last night though, because all the cars are in the garage."

"I did," Adam said. "But I left again early this morning. A friend of mine picked me up at the gate." He took a breath. "Mrs. Regan, I won't be home for about a week. Just taking sort of a vacation."

"All right," she said. "But a letter from your wife came in yesterday afternoon's mail. I left it on the hall table, but I guess you missed it."

"Yes," Adam said. "I guess I did."

"You'll want to pick it up before you go, won't you?"

"No. Just keep it until I get back."

There was a slight pause. "I could send it on to where you're staying?"

"No," Adam said. "I don't know exactly where that will be. I'll be on the road most of the time."

The big man led him back into the room and removed the blindfold. In the evening, his partner brought Adam supper.

They probably take turns guarding the door, Adam thought; the big man during the day and the little man during the night.

Adam spoke. "Have you heard anything from Bannister yet?"

The small man shook his head. He waited for Adam to eat. Impatiently, it seemed. He had the habit of pinching the knuckles of his right hand.

In the morning, the big man brought Adam breakfast.

Adam first sipped some coffee. "Have . . . have you gotten the money yet?"

The big man shook his head. "No. We're giving Bannister until Thursday."

The hours, the days, and the nights passed slowly. And then on Thursday afternoon when the big man entered the room, his voice was harsh. "Bannister's stalling." He removed the blindfold from his pocket. "I'm going to let you talk to him and you'd better be convincing. Tell him to have the money by noon tomorrow."

row or he can forget about the whole thing. Do you understand what I mean?"

Adam wiped perspiration from his hands. "Yes. I understand."

At the phone, Adam waited until he got Bannister and then said, "Harold, why haven't you got the money?"

"Adam?" Bannister said. "Is that you?"

"Yes."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes," Adam said. "I'm all right. But they say that you're stalling."

Bannister hesitated. "No, Adam. But getting that much cash takes a little time. And I've been thinking, your Altiline Chemicals is at 28½ now. I thought that if we could wait until just Monday there might be an upturn."

"Sell it," Adam snapped. "Right now."

Bannister sighed. "All right, Adam. And about your share in the Shore Apartments, the best offer I can get now is \$75,000 from Rogers."

"Let him have it." Adam gripped the phone. "Harold, you've got to have the money by noon tomorrow. If you don't have it by then, it will be too late."

The line was silent for five seconds. "I understand, Adam.

I'll get it together somehow. You can count on me."

At one the next afternoon when the big man brought him his lunch, Adam rose from the cot. "Did Bannister get the money?"

The big man grunted. "We phoned and he says he has. But we'll find out for sure when we make the pickup tonight." He put the tray on the table. "Better pray that nothing goes wrong."

It was past ten that evening when Adam heard the key in the door lock. He found his heart pounding. Both of the men entered and they were still hooded.

Ten minutes later Adam found himself once again bound and blindfolded and lying in the back of a car. It seemed to him that they drove endlessly, but at last the car stopped. He was dragged out and thrown on the grass beside the road.

Adam waited, stiff with dread at what might happen in the next moment. Then he heard the car drive away.

He lay there for a minute breathing deeply with relief and then began working at his bonds. When he was free, he stood up. The night was bright with a full moon and half a mile down the country road he could make out the dark shape of a farmhouse and a barn. He began walking

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toward them to ask for help.

It was after two in the morning before the police finished questioning Adam. When he was released, he found Harold Bannister waiting.

Bannister looked tired. "The police have been at me, Adam. Claim I should have reported the kidnapping to them when I got your note."

Outside the building, they got into Bannister's car. Adam rubbed his eyes. He was weary, but still too tense for sleep. "I could stand a drink."

Bannister turned the ignition key. "There's probably nothing open at this hour, but you can try one of my martinis."

Twenty minutes later, in Bannister's livingroom, Adam sat down in an easy chair and tried to relax. Bannister went to the liquor cabinet. "The one who phoned me had a mid-western accent. Definitely a mid-western accent. What about the other one?"

"I don't know," Adam said. "I never heard him say a word."

Then Adam heard the howling of the dog.

He stiffened as he caught the sound of the approaching plane. The noise grew and grew until the plane roared overhead.

Adam looked at his watch. 2:32 A.M.

His eyes widened. He had heard the dog and that airplane at the same time every night since Monday.

At the liquor cabinet, Bannister surveyed the bottles. "Now where the devil is that vermouth?" Absently he pinched the knuckles of his right hand.

"Ah," he said. "Here it is." He picked up the bottle and turned. "Well, let's hope that the police catch up with your kidnappers."

Adam had been staring at the floor, almost seeing the small room that must be in the basement. Now he looked up at the small lawyer. He smiled faintly. "Yes," he said. "I have a feeling they will."

